

# LEGISLATIVE TESTIMONY



## COMMISSION ON HISPANIC AFFAIRS

### Continue to Determine the Jury Duty Pool From Both the Registered Voter Lists and Driver's License Lists

**Relevant Bill:**  
**SB 5084**  
**Primary Sponsor:**  
**Senator Stevens**

#### ***Ten years later***

In 1993, the State of Washington expanded the jury duty pool from just the rolls of registered voters to also drawing from the lists of persons with driver's licenses. This move to expand the pool of potential jurors has become the standard nationwide in the last ten years. Two reasons behind this expansion were to promote a more inclusive jury duty pool and to avoid the troubling problem of citizens refusing to register to vote to avoid jury duty. SB 5084 would return the jury duty pool to just registered voters, excluding non-registered persons with driver's licenses.

#### ***Hispanic citizens register to vote at a lower rate than non-Hispanics***

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Hispanic citizens register to vote at a significantly lower rate than white non-Hispanics. In 1990, 67% of white non-Hispanics were registered nationwide, compared to 52% of Hispanic citizens. In 2000, 72% of white non-Hispanics were registered to vote, compared to 57% of Hispanic citizens. The numbers reflect the trend of increasing participation by Hispanics in the voting process, but also reflect a recognizable disparity when comparing registration rates between the two groups.

#### ***Hispanic citizens register to vote at a lower rate for several reasons***

Studies show that Hispanic citizens register to vote at a lower rate than non-Hispanics for three main reasons: lack of political leaders, weaknesses in the voting processes in their country of origin, and language barriers. Hispanics do not have a representative number of Latino political leaders in their community for whom to vote. Also, many Hispanics believe that few current leaders directly represent their interests. Out of this lack of representation, a sense of disenchantment has prevented Hispanics from registering at a level comparable to non-Hispanics. Second, many Hispanic immigrants originate from countries with governmental policies that do not inculcate their citizens with a respect for the voting process. Finally, many new Hispanic citizens (especially recently-naturalized senior Hispanics) may face language barriers in accessing the voter registration process. For these and other reasons, Hispanic citizens - honest, hard-working, and civically responsible citizens - are not registering to vote at rates comparable to non-Hispanic whites.

#### ***A jury of your peers***

By limiting the jury duty pool to registered voters, S.B. 5084 would remove a disproportionate number of Hispanics from the chance of serving as a juror. Passage of this bill would adversely affect the Hispanic community in two ways: it would exclude many Hispanics from the important civic duty of serving on a jury, and also would make it that much more difficult for a Hispanic defendant to be judged by a jury of peers.

*The people of the State of Washington have tasked the Commission on Hispanic Affairs with advising the Governor, the Legislature, and state and local agencies on issues that affect the Latino community of the State. The Commission meets with members of the Latino community six times a year throughout the state to gather information as to their concerns.*